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ABSTRACT

Linguicism was first defined as "linguistically related racism" in the early 1990s and only since 1992 have the courts begun to realize the legitimacy of discrimination based upon accent. Professional counselors have experienced the pain and oppression of linguicism in their own lives and in the lives of their family members, students, colleagues, and clients. In this paper ideas, guidelines, and resources for advocating against linguicism are presented. In terms of advocacy, linguicism is defined as prejudice multiplied by power used by members of dominant language groups against non-dominant language groups. Although found worldwide, this paper focuses on linguicism in the United States. This paper presents numerous examples of linguicism experienced by the authors personally and examples encountered by counselors within their professional interactions. It is suggested that in order to operationalize multicultural competencies for counselors, those in the profession need to affirm languages and bilingualism, to question and challenge dominant culture/languages, and to consider how these variables may affect nondominant language client-colleagues. Standard English Privilege, unearned privileges that are conferred on members of the dominant language culture, is discussed. Ways in which counselors who have Standard English Privilege can be allies to persons oppressed by linguicism are examined. (Contains 10 references, 3 recommended readings, and 2 recommended web sites.) (MKA)

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Chapter Three

Challenging Linguicism: Action Strategies for Counselors and Client-Colleagues

By Stuart F. Chen-Hayes, Mei-whei Chen, and Naveeda Athar

"The Chicano, New Mexican, and Mexican history — the silenced American history that I finally did learn and the Spanish language that I now covet — was almost lost to the American dream of white supremacy. My language and cultural education have not been because of my schooling but in spite of it" (Chavez Chavez, 1997, p. 7).

"This is the oppressor's languages (sic) yet I need it to talk to you'...Adrienne Rich's words. Then, when I first read these words, and now, they make me think of standard English, of learning to speak against black vernacular, against the ruptured and broken speech of a dispossessed and displaced people. Standard English is not the speech of exile. It is the language of conquest and domination; in the United States, it is the mask which hides the loss of so many tongues, all those sounds of diverse, native communities we will never hear, the speech of the Gullah, Yiddish, and so many other unremembered tongues. Reflecting on Adrienne Rich's words, I know that it is not the English language that hurts me, but what the oppressors do with it, how they shape it to become a territory that limits and defines, how they make it a weapon that can shame, humiliate, colonize" (bell hooks, 1994, pp. 167-168).

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Linguicism was first defined as "linguistically related racism" in the early 1990s by Danish linguist, Dr. Robert Phillipson (1992). Dr. Phillipson and his colleague, Dr. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, have spent their careers advocating for linguistic human rights. Although having existed for a long time, linguicism was not recognized as a form of discrimination until recently. As Sethi (1998) states:

> "It is only since 1992 that the Courts have begun to realize the legitimacy of discrimination based upon accent. Immigrants...suffer heightened racism because of their accents, including job discrimination and perpetual taunting and caricaturization. This is a severe and pervasive form of racism that is often not acknowledged as racist, or even offensive" (p. 156).

As professional counselors, counselor educators, and client-colleagues (Ivey, 1995), we have experienced the pain and oppression of linguicism in our own lives and in the lives of our family members, students, colleagues, and clients. In this paper, we present ideas, guidelines, and resources for advocating against linguicism. In terms of advocacy, we use a more specific definition of linguicism. We define linguicism as prejudice multiplied by power used by members of dominant language groups against members of non-dominant language groups (Chen-Hayes, 1998).

Although found worldwide, linguicism in the United States will be the focus of this paper. Historically, evidence of linguicism has been found since the beginning of the country. The United States has had implicit and explicit policies elevating English and devaluing other languages. The policies were evidenced by the scholarship of James Crawford, who has written numerous books on how English has been used to attack poor and working class persons and peoples of color in the United States over the decades.

Several recent examples of linguicism in counseling help to bring this home. When one of the authors, who is White, and his partner, who is Chinese, waited in line for registration at the 1998 ACA World Conference in Indianapolis, the author didn't expect anything unusual. The woman asked for his name, and he said, "Chen-Hayes." She came back saying she couldn't find it. He explained that, due to a recent name change, it might still be under "Hayes." She came back with the registration in hand, and ignoring his partner, said only to him, "Why would anyone want to change their name to a CHINESE name?" Shocked, he replied, "Because it's the right thing to do. It's a way of honoring both of us and our families as one." As painful as this incident of linguicism was, it is

a common occurrence throughout the U.S. and elsewhere when members of a dominant language group use their power and resources to restrict access to resources by persons who speak a non-dominant language or speak a dominant language with an accent, or in this case, for persons who have a surname reflecting a non-dominant language or culture.

One of the authors had a male friend who was interviewed by phone for a job in a counselor education program. An interviewer asked if he had adequate English skills to be understood. The candidate, a person of Southeast Asian ethnicity who had graduated from a counselor education program and was currently employed full-time as a counselor educator at another institution, felt humiliated to be asked this question by a faculty member who apparently was unaware of her own linguicism. Hurt by the linguicism, the candidate subsequently withdrew from the search due to such demeaning treatment. Another colleague at a different institution, a multilingual woman of color, has had consistently excellent teaching and peer evaluations. Her department chair, however, criticized her English skills, when according to the experiences and evaluations of colleagues and students, her English skills are exemplary.

If these three examples demonstrate how counselor educators are treated in our profession, what's happening to our students, client-colleagues, and our families and communities? What is happening is common: Speaking a language other than English or speaking English with an accent or dialect is often dismissed as improper, unintelligent, or even illegal.

Following are more examples of linguicism in counseling and counselor education:

- Most counseling programs, materials, presentations, evaluation criteria, teaching, professional association materials, etc. are expected to be done in standard English with little or no accommodation or recognition of other language backgrounds.
- Little or no opportunity for professional counselors in training or beyond to pursue training in a second or third language; credentialing standards don't address language.
- Multicultural counseling has focused primarily on ethnicity and race, with little attention to how language is a critical cultural variable for dominant and non-dominant language speakers in the counseling process.
- Counselors have similar biases to non-counselors in

that most counselors perceive English to be the best or only "proper" language for counseling.

- Counseling students and/or faculty may perceive nonnative English speakers as lacking in skills, intelligence, or ability when the bias reflects the attitude of the English speaker, rather than the deficiency of the nonnative person.
- Non-dominant language speaking client-colleagues are less likely to seek services for fear that they will be misunderstood or discounted.
- Little or no training in how to work ethically with translators when language difference is significant. Do the translators understand confidentiality? Can it be enforced?
- Counselors may not be prepared to understand the subtle biases of linguicism that occur in daily living situations...phone conversations, interactions in shopping or on campus where nonnative speakers or persons who speak English with a dialect are often perceived as immature, ignorant, or less worthy than standard English speakers.
- Counselor trainees may be less likely to be selected for sites where their language background may be perceived as negative.
- Some counselors romanticize the idea that speaking with an accent can indeed gain an easier time with counseling because of the accent.
- Potential hiring of faculty and admission of students may be biased against non-dominant speakers of English; few bilingual or multilingual faculty exist in Counselor Education programs.
- ESL programs often are biased toward losing or discounting one's language/culture of origin and favor assimilating the nonnative speaker into the dominant culture/language.
- Lack of support for the variations in English dialects. Lack of awareness of how dialects may interfere with a non-dominant speaker's understanding of the language, and therefore, lessen the effectiveness of counseling/teaching interactions. Examples include: Black English, southern drawls, and the rapid speaking rate found in parts of the Northeastern United States.

- Use of pace and rate that overwhelm a non-dominant speaker.
- Unwillingness on the part of dominant English speakers to recognize their own bias toward "blaming the victim" — when non-dominant speakers are targeted for mistreatment because of the dominant speaker's insensitivity, bias, or ignorance.
- Misunderstandings of class assignments, where the instructor or supervisor makes assumptions that the message sent was clearly understood or received, and only later does the instructor or supervisor realize that she or he has erred and that a person of non-dominant language background has misunderstood the directions for the assignment or counseling practice.

Deconstructing Unearned Privilege Through Advocacy

To operationalize multicultural competencies for counselors, as Arrendondo et al. (1996) point out, we need to affirm languages and bilingualism, to question and challenge dominant culture/language, and to consider how these variables may affect nondominant-language client-colleagues. In challenging linguicism in culturally competent ways, we have developed a working list of Standard English Privilege for persons who speak fluent English without accents or dialects. Standard English Privilege are unearned privileges that are conferred on members of the dominant language culture. Although often conferred without dominant language speakers' knowledge or consent, these are unearned privileges similar to the concept of White privilege (McIntosh, 1998). The section that follows depicts a partial list of Standard English Privilege:

- Standard English speakers usually can be assured that they will be surrounded by other English speakers at home, at work, and at play.
- Standard English speakers usually can be assured that the major media—newspapers, magazines, books, TV, e-mail, and computers and will all be in English.
- When standard English speakers travel, they usually can be assured that signage, brochures, and information stations will all carry English language materials.
- Standard English speakers usually, for educational purposes, can be assured that standard English will

be the modality of giving instructions, in creating and dissemination educational projects, and in assessing one's educational knowledge (testing).

- In the assessment of mental and physical health, standard English speakers usually can find providers who speak English and who will assess their needs and concerns using tests and diagnostic tools based in English and develop appropriate treatment plans and referrals based on English language concepts.

The list could continue. However, in making this list, we are not blaming standard English speakers for their privilege. Instead, we call upon standard English speakers to be advocates against linguicism and use their privilege to challenge other standard English speakers by interrupting linguicism in the following ways:

- Become fluent in a language other than English and encourage your friends and coworkers to do the same.
- Encourage children and youth to be bilingual/ multilingual.
- Ensure that school programs have instruction in multiple languages throughout the curriculum.
- Encourage mental health and other public agencies, as well as grade school and higher educational teaching and counseling programs, to offer services and coursework in languages in addition to English. This is to (1) promote the well-being of current and future students, educators, families, and communities; (2) to honor the linguistic diversity that has been and continues to be in the United States (and globally); and (3) to increase the employability of graduates of our educational institutions.
- Ensure that practicum and internship classes provide opportunities for students and educators to practice various affirming linguistic techniques/traditions with their students and client-colleagues.
- Develop world wide web pages in multiple languages; work to have journals and other forms of media (newspapers, magazines, radio, and television) translated into languages in addition to English.
- Signage at community conferences, workshops, keynotes, and regular addresses should include live translation as part of the offering in multiple languages.
- Assist organizations/agencies/schools in developing a

resource base of all members/students/families/groups who have fluency/language proficiency for translation purposes and to make these services accessible to community members.

- Assist organizations/agencies/schools to create language-sensitive materials and organize publicity efforts that promote multilingual awareness and challenge linguicism by affirming the strengths of multiple language learning.
- Assume that in good communication a message needs to be sent in multiple ways; just because it is sent in one dominant language doesn't mean that it is effective. Ask questions to clarify and encourage persons to respond.
- Listen to the needs and desires of nondominant English speakers and English speakers who use a dialect or accent. These collaborative efforts work toward community empowerment and solutions, which allows self-determination amongst nondominant speakers.
- If annoyed with a nondominant English speaker's language, accent, or communication style, work not to blame the victim. Instead, challenge yourself about the work you can do to develop empathy and appreciation for cultural variations and linguistic differences.

One of the counseling interventions we propose when working with a client-colleague who is not a native speaker of English is to ask her/him to talk at times in the native language — so we can see and hear the nonverbals, the gestures, the tone, the rate, the pacing — and then ask them to explain how the feelings occur in the native language versus the dominant language. This small exercise deeply honors the client-colleague in multiple ways:

- It affirms the culture of origin and issues of acculturation.
- It affirms that English only conveys part of a client-colleague's issues.
- It affirms bilingualism and biculturalism for counselor and client-colleague.
- It equalizes the power balance by allowing the client-colleague to demonstrate cultural pride and expertise.
- It ensure fewer mistakes on the part of the counselor who misattributes or misinterprets from their own linguistic/cultural/world view framework

At times of greatest stress or other concerns, speaking in one's native language can be a relief and a stress-reducing factor if both parties are open to translation assistance afterward.

Systemic Challenges to Linguicism

It's time to address linguicism on multiple fronts. There are many ways to be systemic advocates against linguicism. We, especially those of us who have Standard English Privileges based on speaking English without an accent or dialect, can be allies to persons oppressed by linguicism. We can all push for the following concepts to curtail linguicism:

- Support bilingual education and challenge the movements to end it, such as California's Proposition 227. There is no credible evidence that bilingual education harms anyone or reduces the likelihood of dominant language acquisition.
- Share information about the benefits of bilingual and multilingual persons in terms of cultural competencies and cognitive complexity.
- Interrupt acts of linguicism and give accurate information about persons who speak nondominant languages or speak English with an accent or dialect.
- Develop second or third language skills to increase your language and cultural competencies.
- Challenge educational institutions and programs (including counselor education) to emphasize the importance of hiring faculty, support staff, and in admitting students with fluency in two or more languages and various English dialects (Ponterotto et al, 1995).
- Ask that educational and mental health agency information — written and spoken — be available in languages in addition to English, especially Spanish, Chinese, Polish, and other languages where large numbers of immigrants who attend are most comfortable in their mother tongue.
- Use the test of reasonable opposites. For example, when a dominant language speaker makes fun of a nondominant speaker's accent ask, "So how many fluent sentences of my language can you speak?" "So why is it that some persons who speak only one language feel superior to those who speak two or more languages?"
- Work with client-colleagues to challenge linguicistic legislation at the state level,for example propositions that restrict or eliminatebilingual education or that insist on

"English" only, and what has been discussed for Puerto Rico by the U.S. House members if it were to become the 51st state.

- Advocate for the including language as a category needing protection due to hate crimes, bias, or both.
- Advocate for keeping records on incidents of hate crimes or job discrimination toward persons who don't speak English or do so with an accent.
- Push educators to teach that the United States has always been a multilingual country and to teach the history of our multilingual origin (what language were we three votes away from speaking in the 1700s? German!)
- Encourage all children and adults and counselors in training to be bilingual. Encourage schools to adopt second and third language requirements early on in elementary school to improve brain power and to appreciate diverse cultures through learning different languages.

Counseling professionals have believed in empowering people subjugated by various forms of oppression. Yet, the existence of linguicism within our field reflects a discrepancy between the belief and the action as Arredondo et al. (1996) state.

A person speaking English with an accent might be assumed to be less intelligent, more difficult to deal with, or viewed in other negative ways. Oftentimes, immigrant adults experience the impatience and even the ridicule of monolingual English speakers when they seek services at a human service agency (p. 48).

Facing this discrepancy, we are honored to begin the dialogue about linguicism with professional counselors, client-colleagues, counselor educators, and members of the public. We hope the ideas in this paper will prompt more discussion and advocate effort against linguicism. We look forward to extending this discussion on multiple fronts, including forthcoming Spanish, Chinese, and Urdu translations of this text.

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Recommended Reading

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Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister outsider.* Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press.

McWhirter, E. H. (1994). *Counseling for empowerment.* Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Recommended Websites

* Linguistic human rights; Challenging linguicism and linguistic imperialism

Dr. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas &/or Dr. Robert Phillipson
Dept. of Language and Culture, Roskilde University, Denmark

Dr. Phillipson's website is: http://babel.ruc.dk/~robert/

Dr. Skutnabb-Kangas' website may be accessed at a link on Dr. Phillipson's website (or vice versa; they are linguistic experts and colleagues). Their scholarship is ground-breaking; they coined the terms linguicism and linguistic imperialism and are perhaps the world's leading advocates for linguistic human rights.

*History and challenging dominant language policy in the United States:

James Crawford, a writer, editor and language policy activist
Website: "Language policy website and emporium"
http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/JWCRAWFORD/home.htm

Crawford has written numerous books and articles that are available at this site. His writing and activism evidence an excellent history of linguicism and language policy as it has been used in the United States to benefit English speakers and persons of dominant racial and social class identities at the expense of persons of color and poor and working class persons.